The Simile of the Saw

A Timeless Guide to an Unshakeable Mind

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The teaching begins with a common hurt: attachment and anger.

The story of the monk Phagguna is introduced.
He had grown too close to a group of nuns.

- If anyone criticized the nuns in his presence, Phagguna would get angry and upset.
- If anyone criticized Phagguna in their presence, the nuns would get angry and upset.

The Buddha summons Phagguna to address this inappropriate attachment and the reactive anger it causes.

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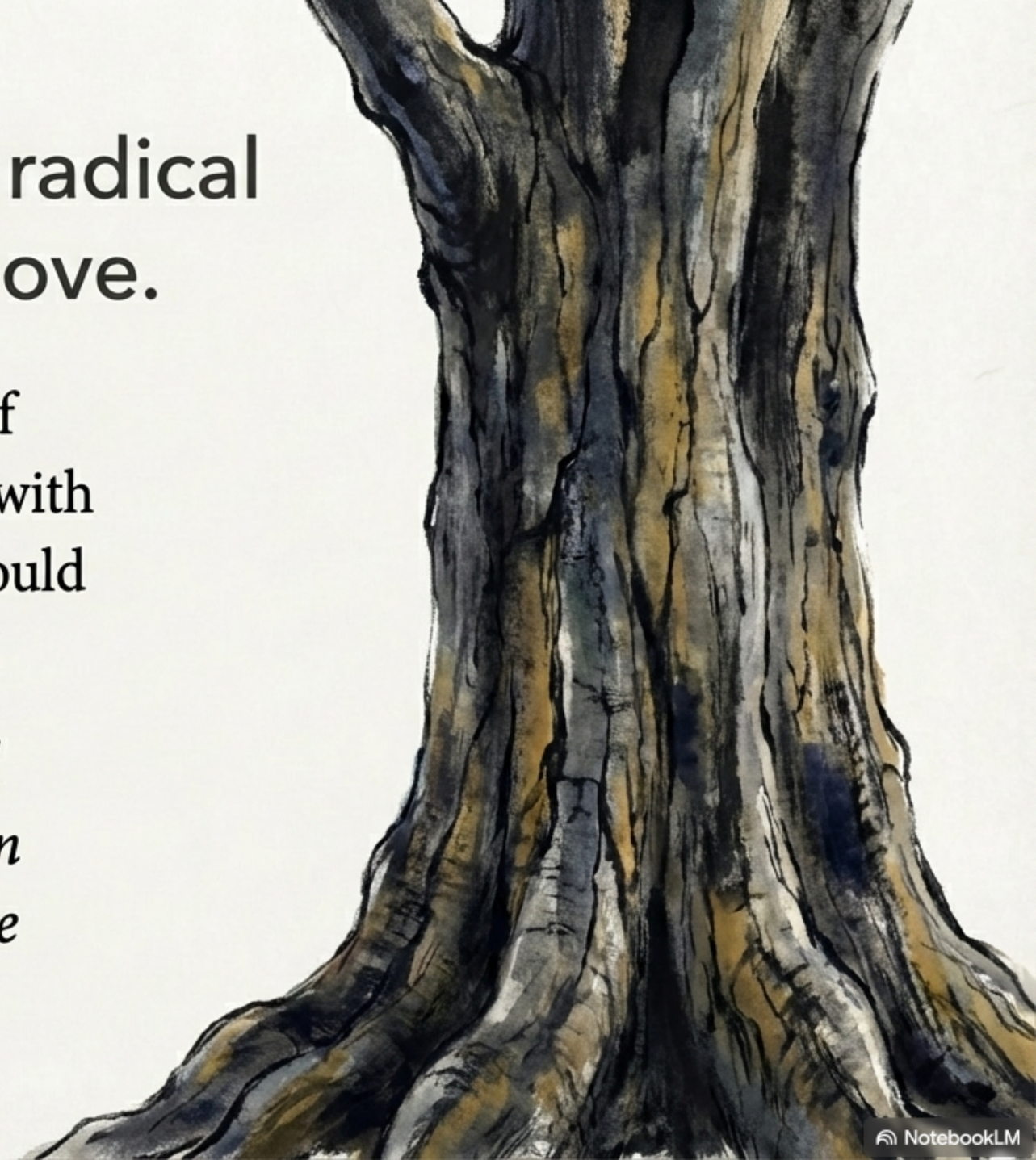
The first instruction is a radical call for dispassion and love.

The Buddha tells Phagguna that even if people were to strike him or the nuns with "fists, stones, rods, and swords," he should train himself with this resolve:

> *"My mind will not degenerate. I will blurt out no bad words. I will remain full of sympathy, with a heart of love and no secret hate."*



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Pressure does not create our character; it reveals it.

The parable of the housewife Vedehikā is introduced.

- She had a pristine reputation: “gentle, even-tempered, and calm.”
- Her bonded maid, Kāḷī, was “deft, tireless, and well-organized.”

Kāḷī wonders if her mistress is truly calm or if her good behavior is merely a result of everything going smoothly. She thinks, “*Why don’t I test my mistress?*”

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A series of small provocations unmasks a hidden rage.

Kāḷī's Three Tests:

1. Test 1: Kāḷī gets up late. Vedehikā scowls.
2. Test 2: Kāḷī gets up even later. Vedehikā "blurted out angry words."
3. Test 3: Kāḷī gets up very late. Vedehikā becomes becomes enraged and hits Kāḷī on the head, "cracking it open."

With blood pouring from her head, Kāḷī exposes her mistress to the neighbors, and Vedehikā's reputation is ruined.

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True equanimity is only known when it is tested by disagreeable words.

The Buddha explains that a person may seem gentle "so long as they don't encounter any disagreeable criticism." He clarifies that being "easy to admonish" for material gain is not true practice. The proper motivation is to train oneself purely out of reverence for the teaching itself.

You should train yourselves: 'We will be easy to admonish purely because we honor, respect, revere, worship, and venerate the teaching.'

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Any verbal attack can be analyzed through five distinct qualities.

Timely

Untimely

True

False

Gentle

Harsh

Beneficial

Harmful

From a heart of love

From secret hate

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This is the unwavering resolve to cultivate in the face of any speech.

Our minds will not degenerate. We will blurt out no bad words. We will remain full of sympathy, with a heart of love and no secret hate. We will meditate spreading a heart of love to that individual. And with them as a basis, we will meditate spreading a heart full of love to everyone in the world—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.

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Train your mind to be like the great earth: vast, deep, and impossible to defile.

A person tries to “make this great earth be without earth” by digging, scattering, spitting, and urinating on it. They will only “get weary and frustrated.” The practice is to train the mind to be “like the earth—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.”

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Train your mind to be like space: formless, open, and impossible to paint upon.

A person tries to “draw pictures in space” with bright dyes. This is impossible because “space has no form or appearance.” They will only become weary. The practice is to train the mind to be ‘like space—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.”

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Train your mind to be like the river Ganges: deep, flowing, and impossible to burn.

A person tries to ‘burn and scorch the river Ganges with this blazing grass torch.” They cannot succeed because the river is too deep and vast. The practice is to train the mind to be “like the Ganges—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.”

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Train your mind to be like a well-rubbed catskin: soft, pliant, and making no sound when struck.

A catskin bag, “rubbed, well-rubbed, very well-rubbed,” becomes “soft, silky, rid of rustling and crackling.” A person fails to make it make noise with a stick or stone. The practice is to train the mind to be “like a catskin bag—abundant, expansive, limitless, free of enmity and ill will.”

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The ultimate test: even if bandits were to sever you limb from limb with a two-handed saw.

"Even if low-down bandits were to sever you limb from limb with a two-handed saw, anyone who had a malevolent thought on that account would not be following my instructions."

"Our minds will not degenerate... We will remain full of sympathy, with a heart of love and no secret hate..."

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If you frequently reflect on this advice, is there any criticism, large or small, that you could not endure?

No, sir.

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You should frequently reflect on this advice on the simile of the saw.

This will be for your lasting welfare and happiness.

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